

# National Sovereignty & Universal Challenges: Choices for the World After Iraq

## Background Document

### **“Might vs. Right in the Struggle for the New World Order”**

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The Bush administration's neo-conservatives are capitalizing on military victory in Iraq to market American unilateralism as the new organizing principle of international relations. They talk triumphantly of the “salutary” effects of the war on the political situation in Syria and the Korean Peninsula. And they boast of the irrelevance of multilateralism as a philosophy and of the United Nations as an institution. Ultimately, they promise safety and security. It is a false promise.

The ideological battle they are waging to further American unilateralism over “old Europe” multilateralism is in many ways a modern replay of the classic conflict between might and right. The world's peoples and their leaders will not comply with the Bush administration's security demands because they believe in the righteousness of American domination. Rather, a world order based on America's military determination to act unilaterally will be secured by the barrel of a very large gun. In contrast, when the United Nations Security Council promulgates a resolution, its power mostly draws from voluntary international support for a still deeply flawed but evolving multilateral system of rules.

In promoting his vision of national might over international right President Bush at West Point last year spoke in terms of ending “armed conflict in our world.” In addition to his now well-known unilateral doctrine of preemptive war, he explained, “America has, and intends to keep, military strength beyond challenge thereby making the destabilizing arms race of other eras pointless, and limiting rivalries to trade and other pursuits of peace.”

Is this possible? Can America bully the world into security? Surely, at least in the short term President Bush's approach has dramatically raised global tensions generally and anti-Americanism specifically. The days after September 11<sup>th</sup> when *Le Monde* declared, “We are all Americans,” seem like a distant memory. But, perhaps President Bush believes darkly with Machiavelli that it is better to be feared than loved. If so, he is wrong, not only morally, but functionally. The continued American stifling of a legitimate system of global right will exacerbate, not end, armed conflict.

If the Bush administration's disregard for multilateral institutions and constraints succeed in making them “irrelevant,” their irrelevancy won't just unfetter the United States. Other countries will almost certainly emulate the super power and use military force against their less powerful neighbors. India has already spoken of following the American pre-emptive war example in its dealing with Pakistan. In terms of terrorism, the Bush approach will not unnerve those who have made it abundantly clear they are willing to die “martyrs” deaths in gross acts of terrorism, and it stokes,

rather than dampens, their fires of hatred. Finally, rather than accepting an American imperium, not only Russia and China, but even close allies such as Germany and France now talk about diplomatically or militarily checking the United States. If this serves to replicate the aggressive balance of power politics of the last century, but with new and proliferating weapons of mass destruction, even that century's unprecedented horror could be surpassed.

Of course President Bush is correct that the international system of right is not yet up to the job of securing a safe future. Before his election though it was making significant strides in that direction. During the 1990's beginning with the first Gulf War, though the road was often bumpy, the Security Council racked up considerable successes in places such as Cambodia, Haiti and East Timor. That decade also saw the birth of the World Trade Organization with its truly effective mechanism for resolving billions of dollars in trade disputes between nations, the considerable deepening of the European Union, the coming into force of the Law of the Sea Treaty, the creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the Agreement for a permanent International Criminal Court. If the Bush administration was leading rather than undermining the development of this system, comprehensive global security goals could be achieved.

A system of American unilateral might over international legal right makes us all far less safe. And ultimately it betrays the very wisdom and democratic spirit of America's own deepest constitutional values which entrust governance to a system of laws and not of men.

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